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Corbey, Raymond

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## FREUD'S PHYLOGENETIC NARRATIVE

Raymond Corbey

In diesen wie in vielen anderen Hinsichten lebt der Mensch der Vorzeit ungeändert in unserem Unbewussten fort.

Sigmund Freud, 1915

In much of the secondary literature on otherness/alterity a psychoanalytic frame of reference is present, more or less explicitly. The fierce nature — uncontrolled, aggressive, lascivious — attributed to others such as the medieval wild man or nineteenth-century 'savages' is usually explained in terms of 'projection' or similar impulses which are held to govern the behaviour of those who cherish such images of others. Interestingly, the psychoanalytic paradigm which is used to explain structures of alterity seems itself to be implicated in those selfsame structures. My aim in this paper is to lay bare the role of alterity in the architecture of psychoanalytic theory, and to reflect upon the strange circularity of a theoretical perspective which itself, to a certain extent, seems to be tainted by the phenomenon it purports to explain.

We shall have to deal with some analogous, interconnected or convergent themes and ideas in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anthropology, archeology, folklore studies and philosophy. But first let us take a look at the persistent concern with the archaic/primitive in Freud's thought.

*Freud on the archaic*

Throughout his life Freud maintained a keen interest in archeology and cultural history. Not only was he widely read in these fields, and a fanatic collector of antiquities; his bent towards prehistory was, as Paul Ricoeur once remarked, one of the most tenacious tendencies of his thought. The human soul, according to Freud, carries many traces of what befell to our prehistoric ancestors. The terms *archaisch*, *prähistorisch*, *primitiv* and *urzeitlich* abound in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), as well as in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905).

Freud's most important work on cultural history is probably *Totem and Tabu - Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (1913). Many of the building blocks of this work were present as early as 1900.<sup>1</sup> Here, Freud launches his famous thesis of the primal patricide. In the prehistoric horde, the sons murdered and ate the father who dominated them and monopolized the women of the group, thus gaining access to these women, their sisters and mothers. But out of remorse over this terrible deed — for they had not only hated but also loved him — they refrained from intercourse with the women of their group/totem, and from killing their totem, the substitute or surrogate of their dead father.<sup>2</sup> What became taboo here corresponded to the two crimes of Oedipus, and to the two primal wishes of the male child: killing the father and marrying the mother. Thus originated social order, law and religion.

Apart from being influenced by Haeckel's biogenetic law and by the theory of survivals, Freud was a convinced Lamarckian, who believed that the memories of this tragedy were inheritable as acquired characteristics, and thus became part and parcel of everyman's psychological make-up. Contemporary 'primitives' or 'savages', for him, represented an early phase in the development of humanity: he regarded them as contemporary ancestors. As such they were comparable to the early phase of

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<sup>1</sup> This contention is based on a careful investigation of Freud's early writings by I. Wallace in his *Freud and Anthropology. A History and Reappraisal*, New York 1983, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Totem und Tabu*, in the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Writings of Sigmund Freud*, London 1953 ff., 13: 141-3. To be referred to hereinafter as *SE*.

individual development: the child, with its characteristic sexual inclinations and world view. In addition, primitives, prehistoric or contemporary, were comparable to another case of arrested development: the neurotic. Neurosis is an atavism, a case of regression, not only ontogenetically, but also phylogenetically. All three, the primitive, the child and the neurotic, Freud holds, are characterized by a deficient sense of reality and by belief in the omnipotence of thought.

In 1983 an unknown manuscript by Sigmund Freud was found among the papers of his friend Sándor Ferenczi. It concerns a sketch for an *Overview of the Transference Neuroses*, as it is entitled, written down by Freud in 1915, two years after the publication of *Totem and Tabu*.<sup>3</sup> The second part of this manuscript, never published and never intended to be published, is highly interesting in the present context. In this second part, which in a letter to Ferenczi Freud called his 'phylogenetic fantasy',<sup>4</sup> specific causal connections are postulated between several types of contemporary neuroses and the experiences of mankind during the harsh, anxiety-provoking ice ages which put an end to its previous paradisiacal existence. Problems in the psychosexual development of the individual reflect what happened in correlating phases in the development of prehistoric humanity. Many of the characteristic emotional reactions, sexual peculiarities and coping strategies of neurotics were once effective adaptations to the severe, traumatizing living conditions, natural and social, of primal times: the cold, scarcity of food, persecution and castration by fathers, the killing of fathers. In ontogeny, phylogeny still manifests itself.

In Freud's later publications this lamarckist point of view keeps appearing again and again. In his *Introductory Lectures to Psycho-Analysis* (1916/17), for instance, he remarks that it is very well possible that everything that is told as a fantasy during analysis today — child seduction, the awakening of sexual excitement through watching the parents having intercourse, the threat of castration — was once, in the earliest days of mankind, real. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), mass movements are interpreted as a revival of the power struggle in the primal horde, with the figure of the father/leader, with

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<sup>3</sup> S. Freud, *Übersicht der Übertragungsneurosen. Ein bisher unbekanntes Manuskript* (ed. I. Grubrich-Simitis), Frankfurt 1986; also available as *A Phylogenetic Phantasy. Overview of the Transference Neuroses*, (ed. I. Grubrich-Simitis, transl. A. & P.T. Hoffer), Harvard University Press 1987.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* (1986), p. 90. The letter is dated July 18, 1915.

whom all the group members identify, as the key to social cohesion. 'Just as primitive man survives potentially in every individual,' Freud holds, 'so the primal horde may arise once more out of any random collection; in so far as men are habitually under the sway of group formation we recognize in it the survival of the primal horde' (SE 18: 123).

Again, in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), he tries to understand the institution of religion in terms of neurotic remorse over the murder of the primal father. In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), a work that stresses the importance of the aggressive instinct and interprets culture as a struggle to control this instinct, he explains the excessively strong aggressive reactions of children to the first major instinctual frustrations and their correspondingly strong super-ego by pointing out that they are 'following a phylogenetic model and [are] going beyond the response that would be currently justified' (SE 21: 131). But especially his last work (his 'psychoanalytic novel', as he once called it), *Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays* (1939), represents a last and firm recapture of the phylogenetic plot of *Totem and Tabu*. 'The behaviour of neurotic children towards their parents in the Oedipus and castration complex', Freud writes here, 'abounds in such reactions, which seem unjustified in the individual case and only become intelligible phylogenetically — by their connection with the experience of earlier generations' (SE 23: 99). And: 'The essential point, however, is that we attribute the same emotional attributes to these primitive men that we establish by analytic investigation in the primitives of the present day — in our children' (SE 23: 81-2). Among the instinctual wishes 'born afresh with every child' he stated earlier, 'are those of incest, cannibalism and lust for killing'.<sup>5</sup>

#### *The predicament of primitive man*

Now that we have seen in outline how Freud's views of the wild nature and dramatic experiences of prehistoric man function in his interpretations of human behaviour, let us have a look at some backgrounds to these views.

In the nineteenth-century imagination, primal man had very peculiar

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<sup>5</sup> 'The future of an illusion', SE 21: 10.

characteristics. In his *Primitive Marriage* (1865) for instance, McLennan, one of the evolutionary anthropologists whose ideas Freud knew and was influenced by, held promiscuity, even to the point of incest, to be normal during the first stage of the evolution of mankind.<sup>6</sup> As men were aggressive and violent, and women usually depraved, primitive marriage was (and still is among contemporary primitives) no more than a kind of rape. What is punished in civilized countries as crime was and still is customary among savages. McLennan's ideas on tribal or prehistoric others were by no means exceptional. They can be found in the work of other evolutionists like Edward Tylor, John Lubbock or Herbert Spencer, and indeed constituted a received view of the period.

The predicament of primitive man was one of impulsiveness and lack of self-control, of passing directly from impulse to gratification. Intellectually, the primitive mind was inconsistent, childish, confused, deficient in foresight, inclined to embroider facts with phantasies. Civilization was only possible on the basis of steering and regulating, or even repressing man's rude primary impulses. Evolutionary progress implied the domestication of man's bestial nature, the taming of the beast within, the triumph of reason in the transcendence of brute creation. Mary Midgley has shown convincingly how negatively the animal, man's primary other, has been stereotyped in most of western thought; animal categories used in nineteenth century discourse were no exception.<sup>7</sup> Animals have always been 'good to think with', as Lévi-Strauss put it, and in principle can have many meanings; in the case outlined here, they were a paragon of wickedness. As Darwin jotted down in an early evolutionary notebook, commenting upon the instinctive origin of mankind's evil passions: 'The devil under form of Baboon is our grandfather!'<sup>8</sup>

The monstrous primal man who is so prominently present in Freud's theorizing about human behaviour has a long pedigree. He shares many features with the monstrous Plinian races from antiquity such as the headless *Blemmyae* or the dog-headed *Cynocephali*, living on the margins of the known world, with characteristics that are the inverse of those of

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<sup>6</sup> J.F. McLennan, Chicago 1970.

<sup>7</sup> M. Midgley, *Beast and Man. The Roots of Human Nature*, London 1980.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted by G. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York/London 1987), p. 222; the remark dates from 1838.

normal people; or with the medieval wild man and wild woman, ferocious beings situated deep in the forests and thought to give free rein to their aggressive and sexual instincts; or with the missing link of eighteenth century natural history, *homo silvestris* or *caudatus*, half man, half ape. All these imaginary others were contrasted with normal men: they inhabited the sphere of wildness outside the civilized world, often had animal characteristics, and generally their behaviour was uncontrolled. The same goes for primitive man, prehistoric or contemporary, in the nineteenth-century imagination, still living in that state of savagery from which the ascent to modern - white, middle-class, male - civilization had started.

Primitive man, moreover, was equated metaphorically with other social categories: not only, as we have already seen, to neurotics, and madmen in general, but also to peasants, labourers, criminals, prostitutes and women generally. People of these categories were held to be governed more by impulse, to be less capable of rational thinking, to be more like animals and closer to nature or to the natural beginnings of mankind, phylogenetically and ontogenetically. Many authors associated prostitution with essential femininity and saw it as an atavism, a form of behaviour once normal among all women. Typical physical characteristics of prostitutes such as the form of the ears, face and genitals were perceived as archaic, and as parallel to that of black African women.<sup>9</sup> The discourse defining these mutually connected categories as 'others' and excluding them from proper humanity was, of course, a strategy of subjection and power. Peasants, women, the 'inferior races', workers all stood in a subordinate, often exploitative hierarchical relationship to white middle- and upper-class males who dominated politics, the economy and discourse.

Thus the nature of man's primitive other was in accordance with a nineteenth-century discourse on savagery and civilization, on wildness and control, a discourse that played a substantial role in the constitution of psychoanalytic theory. In Freud's theorizing, a stereotypical wild other, now internalized, in fact still roams the inner landscape of the human psyche, the wildness within, as he once roamed the wilderness without. His aggressive and promiscuous nature may have contributed considerably to

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<sup>9</sup> See S. L. Gilman, 'Black bodies, white bodies: Toward an iconography of female sexuality in late nineteenth-century art, medicine and literature', in *'Race', Writing and Difference*, ed. H.L. Gates (Chicago/ London 1986), pp. 223-61.

Freud's hobbesian view of man:

After all, we assume that in the course of man's development from a primitive state to a civilized one his aggressiveness undergoes a very considerable degree of internalization or turning inwards; if so, his internal conflicts would certainly be the proper equivalent for the external struggles which have then ceased.<sup>10</sup>

*Archeology and folklore*

There are two more specific cultural interests Freud took inspiration from in his theorizing on human behaviour: archeology and folklore.

Freud's study and his adjacent consulting room were crammed with antiquities - Egyptian, Greek, Etruscan, Roman, Asian, African. He was an avid collector, who used to set down new acquisitions before him on the dining room table during family meals, so that he could touch, study and enjoy them. The statues of mythical figures which surrounded Freud and his patients on the couch not merely served decorative purposes, but provided him with clues, in the form of stories, dramatic plots, to the nature of his patient's problems.<sup>11</sup> 'Here in Freud's corner,' writes Rita Ransohoff, 'the mythological figures from Pompeii and the head of the Roman citizen illuminate contrasting aspects of man: his impulsive animal nature and the civilizing influence of conscience and law. Here is a suggestion of the images of the id and the superego, two aspects of Freud's hypothesis of the structure of the mind.'<sup>12</sup>

Freud was convinced that everything once formed in the mind would survive or leave traces in one way or another in deep 'layers' of the psyche. He was a great admirer of Heinrich Schliemann, who heroically delved into the debris of ancient Troy, and often compared the analyst's work to the archeologist's laborious interpretation of excavated prehistoric

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<sup>10</sup> 'Analysis terminable and interminable', *SE* 23: 244.

<sup>11</sup> See Marianna Torgovnick, 'Entering Freud's study', in Id., *Gone Primitive. Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago/London 1990), pp. 194-209.

<sup>12</sup> 'Captions to the photographs', in E. Engelman, *Berggasse 19. Sigmund Freud's Home and Offices, Vienna 1938* (Chicago/London 1981), p. 59.



layers.<sup>13</sup> Archeological metaphors are pervasive in psychoanalysis, the archeology of the soul, structuring its discourse, its conceptual space. They suggestively communicate, as Donald Kuspit argues, authoritative core distinctions like the ones between surface and depth, manifest and latent, adult and infantile, civilized and uncivilized, historic and prehistoric, fact and fantasy, more and less fundamental.<sup>14</sup>

Another area of interest Freud took cues from was folklore. During many years he was an enthusiastic reader of the journal *Anthropophyteia*, devoted to folklore, especially of a sexual and scatological nature, and in 1913 he wrote a preface to the German translation of Bourke's *Scatological Rites of All Nations*.<sup>15</sup> I think a careful investigation of his interpretations of anthropological material of this kind would show that from the outset they were laden with the selfsame theoretical viewpoints on human behaviour they were meant to support. Folklore, Freud states in his preface to Bourke's work, 'shows us how incompletely the repression of coprophilic inclinations has been carried out among various peoples at various times and how closely at other cultural levels the treatment of excretory substances approximates to that practised by children.'<sup>16</sup> Here he attempts to explain cultural variability in terms of an opposition between civilized adults controlling an urge of the postulated type and childish primitives giving rein to it.

But theories of such phenomena as liminality, taboo, purity, transgression and inversion — as developed in British symbolic anthropology of the last three decades by such authors as Mary Douglas and Victor Turner — throw a completely different light on the reasons why in different cultural contexts variable categories of things, situations, behaviours may be forbidden or impure — primarily on the *cultural* plane, not on that of man's psychological make-up. German culture especially, as Alan Dundes has shown, is very rich in anal expressions, jokes, insults and

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<sup>13</sup> See for instance *SE* 23: 259-260.

<sup>14</sup> D. Kuspit, 'A mighty metaphor: The analogy of archaeology and psychoanalysis', in *Sigmund Freud and Art. His Personal Collection of Antiquities*, ed. L. Gamwell & R. Wells (New York/London 1989), pp. 133-51; esp. p. 135.

<sup>15</sup> Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>16</sup> *SE* 12: 337; quoted by Wallace, *op.cit.*, p. 48.

curse.<sup>17</sup> Freud, however, mistook the many utterances of this type he came across in his practice for evidence of an underlying anal inclination, and even postulated the existence of a typical anal-erotic character.<sup>18</sup> In fact, anal expressions are a typical example of a powerful symbolic repertoire adopted from borders, margins and edges. What is culturally 'low' and excluded from official discourse is an effective means of parody, subversion and inversion.<sup>19</sup> Time and again Freud was confronted with phenomena from the rich sphere of folklore and popular culture, as analysed so eloquently by Bakhtin in *Rabelais and his world*. The suppression of that sphere was not a psychological mechanism, but a political one, an act of censorship, a strategy of power.

Freud's arguments in this field suffer from a fundamental *petitio principii*. On the one hand, folklore, mythology, ethnology etc. are supposed to deliver evidence supporting the psychoanalytic view of human behaviour, while on the other hand Freud holds that mythology and the universe of fairytales are incomprehensible without taking into account the sexuality of the child as understood by psychoanalytic theory. His evidence, in other words, from the very beginning seems to be constructed in terms of the theory it is to support.<sup>20</sup>

### *Philosophy of life*

It is neither possible nor necessary in the present context to consider or even to mention all influences on Freud's interpretations of human behaviour; but we should take a brief look at one important current at least in nineteenth-century thought, one which steered Freud's views of human

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<sup>17</sup> Alan Dundes, *Life is like a Chicken Coop Ladder. A Portrait of German Culture through Folklore*, New York 1984. Dundes' monograph remains tied, however, to a psychoanalytic perspective, and does not apply theories developed by symbolic anthropologists to scatological expressions.

<sup>18</sup> Thus his 'Character and anal eroticism' (1908), *SE* 9: 169-75.

<sup>19</sup> P. Stallybrass & A. White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, London 1986; and cf. Kathleen M. Ashley, *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism: Between Literature and Anthropology*, Bloomington 1990.

<sup>20</sup> See C. Lévi-Strauss, *La potière jalouse*, Paris 1985, pp. 252 and 256; and cf. his criticism of the way Freud interprets myths, pp. 248-249.

motivation: the *Philosophie des Lebens*, and especially Nietzsche and Schopenhauer.

The precise extent to which Freud was influenced by Nietzsche is controversial, but both authors interpret human morality as the outcome of a tragic conflict between the pressures of civilization and the demands of instinct, between the social and the biological, a conflict that has its repercussion in man's archaic bad conscience. Nietzsche's remark that conscious reason may be no more than a 'more or less fantastic commentary on an unknown, perhaps unknowable but felt text'<sup>21</sup> — that of our deepest impulses — might as well stem from Freud. In *Die Geburt der Tragödie* Nietzsche, like Freud, postulated an era of wild otherness at the beginnings of mankind, preceding the civilized Apollinian period: the era of the sexually unrestrained, amoral Dionysians, still one with nature, symbolized by the chorus of half-bestial satyrs in Greek tragedy.

A passage called 'Traum und Kultur' from Nietzsche's *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (1878) highlights some of his ideas on this point, and their great similarity to views held by Freud:

The brain function which is most strongly restricted by sleep is memory: not that it stops completely - but it is reduced to a state of imperfection, as, in the earliest days of mankind, it may have been with everybody even when awake in the daytime. Arbitrary and confused as it is, it continually exchanges one thing for another on the basis of the most superficial similarities [...] and even now travellers observe regularly how strong is the savage's tendency to forgetfulness, and how [...] from sheer debilitation, he produces lies and nonsense. But we all resemble this savage [...] The complete clarity of all dream images, which is contingent on an unconditional belief in their reality, reminds us again of the state that primeval man found himself in, in which hallucination was an extraordinarily frequent phenomenon that now and then simultaneously held whole communities, whole peoples in its sway. Thus in sleep and dream we go once more through the daily business of early mankind.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. K. Schlechta (München 1969), 1: 1095.

<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, I: 453-4; and cf. Kim Holmes, 'Freud, Evolution and the Tragedy of Man', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 31 (1983): 187-210.

In an addendum from 1919 to his *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud concurs with Nietzsche's view that in dreams man's innate archaic heritage manifests itself:

We can guess how much to the point is Nietzsche's assertion that in dreams 'some primaeval relic of humanity is at work which we can now scarcely reach any longer by direct path'; and we may expect that the analysis of dreams will lead us to a knowledge of man's archaic heritage, of what is psychically innate in him. (*SE* 5: 548-9)

According to both authors, primitive man survives under the thin layer of civilized morality, although Freud, unlike Nietzsche with his idea of the *Übermensch*, never wanted man to overthrow civilized self-control, merely to moderate it. An analogous interpretation of the human condition is to be found in the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, who sees the conscious intellect as but a weak servant of man's proper nature: mighty, blind, irrational, insatiable *Wille*. Schopenhauer substantially influenced Nietzsche, and was regularly quoted approvingly by Freud. In fact, Freud is one of many thinkers who were influenced by the romantic climate of opinion of the *Philosophie des Lebens* which, in reaction to the rationalism of Enlightenment authors, somehow always stressed the nonrational, the emotional, the unconscious: *das Andere der Vernunft, Leben, Wille*. This was one of the great themes of the period, worked out in different directions by philosophers contemporary to Freud, such as Ludwig Klages and Max Scheler.<sup>23</sup>

For our present purposes it is not so very important to precisely reconstruct the - very complicated - lines along which ideas were handed down and came to feed into one physician's brilliant attempts to make sense of his clinical observations. Thus, there is much discussion, even to the point of futility, on the origins of Freud's concept of the *Es*, and the role of a wide range of authors including Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Eduard

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. O. Marquard, *Transzendentaler Idealismus - Romantische Naturphilosophie - Psychoanalyse*, Dinter 1987, a very detailed study on the philosophical backgrounds of psychoanalysis.

von Hartmann, Groddeck and Klages.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, it is very difficult to ascertain how Darwinian ideas came to Freud — directly or via Nietzsche and several other mediating authors. More important for us are certain aspects of the *general* structure of a nineteenth-century discourse on man and reality by which psychoanalysis was influenced. We already inquired into the role of the wild primitive Other in Freud's view of man. Here we see another way in which Freud's idea of 'wildness within' was strengthened: many nineteenth-century authors with whom he was well acquainted (and who articulated the *Zeitgeist* within which he worked) stressed the nonrational, wild, creative, mighty 'impulse' or 'life' in man.

Indeed, the two ideas were connected: that of the wild primitive within and that of the blind impulse within, both in Freud and in nineteenth-century thought. This is evident in the case of Nietzsche's notion of dionysian life, and also from the pervasive association of prehistoric or contemporary 'primitives' with impulsiveness and lack of restraint. A fine example of the theme of wildness within is a comment upon developments in Germany written in Paris in 1934 by an anonymous German *Exil*-intellectual:

It is true that the wild, the bestial, the wild colours of the drives have evened out, worn off, and have been polished up and subdued in the course of the centuries, in which society has quelled age-old urges and impulses. It is true that increasing refinement has made him more serene and noble, but all the time the animal spirit sleeps at the bottom of his being. There is still a lot of animal in him [...] When the graph of life curves downward to the red line of the primitive, the mask drops; naked as in the old days he breaks loose, primeval man, the cave-dweller, in the total profligacy of his unleashed drives.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See B. Nitzschke, 'Zur Herkunft des "Es"', *Psyche* 37 (1983): 769-804, and several reactions to his interpretation in *Psyche* 39 (1985): 97-178.

<sup>25</sup> Anon., *Naziführer sehen dich an*, Paris 1934; quoted by K. Theweleit, *Männerphantasien*, Reinbek 1987, 2: 25.

*Psychoanalysis as fiction*

Let us recapitulate. We are inquiring into structures of alterity in the heart of the very same theory that is often invoked to explain such structures: psychoanalysis. As a convinced lamarckian, Freud assumed the nature and experiences of prehistoric man still to be relevant for an adequate understanding of the everyday behaviour of modern man. Primitive/primal man still lives within us. But this primitive man is truly 'primitive': a sort of monster, lascivious and violent. In fact he is, as we have seen, a stereotypical wild other from a nineteenth-century discourse on civilization and progress. This discourse, as variably as it may have manifested itself, in one way or another essentially operated with polar opposites: culture and nature, men and women, white and black, adult and child, man and beast, the rational and the emotional, contemporary and primal society. All the mutually associated categories that were subsumed under the second pole of these oppositions were regarded as impulsive, wild, uncontrolled. Freud's interpretations underwent similar, convergent influences from archeology and folklore, and from a romantic discourse on 'life', which stressed the blind impulse (*Trieb*) within, and opposed it to the controlling instance of the human intellect.

'Master of narrative, builder of myth': that is how George Steiner has characterized Freud.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the psychoanalytic theory of human functioning possesses a pregnant narrative structure. It is a myth, a *muthein* in the sense of Aristotle's *Poetics*: a *mise-en-intrigue*. Myth is often defined as the primary way in which men interpret themselves symbolically, as a traditional narrative which explains how things are now in terms of what happened at the beginnings of times. Freud's origin myth tries to make sense of the intricacies of present-day human behaviour by narrating about primal times when savage men still lived in hordes and murdered their fathers to gain access to their mothers and sisters, then out of remorse.... These dramatic occurrences, he holds, still put their mark upon the soul of modern, only superficially civilized man.

Freud's *Es*, I suggest, is an avatar of the imaginary, wild Other, who now inhabits the wilderness within just like the monstrous Plinian races once inhabited the wilderness without, the wild periphery of the

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<sup>26</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 6 September 1987.

civilized world. The dramatic struggle between the *Über-Ich* and the *Es*, which is to be civilized, controlled, domesticated, is nothing but a counterpart of the equally dramatic colonialist 'civilizatory' offensive of imperial empires subjecting dark-skinned peoples defined as wild, still-natural, contemporary savages, recipients of the good brought to them by white heroes in this narrated, imaginary world.

Women play a very passive and marginal role in Freud's phylogenetic speculations. Moreover, he does not escape from that association of women with other categories of impulsive others (savages, ancestors, children, neurotics, the lower classes) which was so common in the last century. In the second of his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, for instance, he links female nature with the polymorphously perverse disposition of the child, with prostitution, and with sexuality among the uncontrolled lower classes in general.<sup>27</sup> Freud despised the masses, looked upon them as unrestrained, unable to control their impulses, unlike the civilized elite he was glad to reckon himself among. In his letters, for instance one to Arnold Zweig in 1927, and in private conversation, for instance with Lou Andreas-Salomé in 1929, he often used the denigrating term *Gesindel*, rabble, for common people, as well as for the neurotic patients he treated.<sup>28</sup>

In *Die Frage der Laienanalyse* he calls adult female sexuality the 'dark continent' of psychology.<sup>29</sup> S.L. Gilman comments:

In using this phrase in English, Freud ties the image of female sexuality to the image of the colonial black and to the perceived relationship between the female's ascribed sexuality and the Other's exoticism and pathology. It is Freud's intent to explore this hidden 'dark continent' and reveal the hidden truths about female sexuality, just as the anthropologists-explorers [...] were revealing the hidden truths about the nature of the black. Freud continues a discourse which relates the images of male discovery to the images of the female as object of discovery. (Gilman, *op.*

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<sup>27</sup> For an analysis of these associations, see S. Gilman, 'Freud and the prostitute: Male stereotypes of female sexuality in fin-de-siècle Vienna', *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 9 (1981): 337-60.

<sup>28</sup> See P. Gay, *Freud. A Life for our Times*, New York 1988, note 4 to chapter 11.

<sup>29</sup> *SE* 20: 212. In the original text the expression is in English.

*cit.*, p. 257)

Did Freud himself not, we might add, once refer to his *Konquistadoren-temperament*?<sup>30</sup> All the mechanisms and tropes that generally govern the images of others at the period are present: women as seen by men, peasants or the lower classes as seen by the bourgeois, blacks as seen by whites. The attributes of the other constitute an inversion of one's own: we are rational while they are not, we control ourselves while they are impulsive, we are completely human while they are not, we are civilized beings while they are closer to raw nature. At the same time, a mechanism of exclusion is at work: the other is excluded from (what is seen as) proper humanity. Furthermore, others are equated metaphorically and metonymically with animals. And they often are categorically ambiguous, not altogether human, nor altogether animal, and for that reason invested with strong emotions, in the same way as the scatological.

The others inhabit, as we do ourselves, a discursively constructed imaginary world, a Bakhtinian 'chronotope'. This semiotic space is divided into two spheres, that of civilized humanity where we live, and that beyond the boundary, the sphere of wildness, where they live. This chronotope provides the setting for stories in which we and the others are narrative characters, such as the story of Europeans who in the name of Civilization have to go among savages, or that of Christians who in the name of God have to go among the heathens. According to psychoanalysis, we all have to conquer and domesticate the wildness within, in the name of proper humanity. In colonialist discourse, white colonials go into the wilderness to cultivate it, bringing civilization. In Christian discourse, it is the missionary who heroically crosses the boundary between civilization and wildness in order to proselytize. In many tribal societies, the shaman/healer plays a similar role, as an exemplary mediator between this world and the other one, the one he travels through by virtue of his techniques of ecstasy. Again, the role of the psychoanalyst in psychoanalytic discourse is highly similar, as is the formalized, ritual context in which his activities take place. The analyst is a character in a dramatic narrative, who heroically penetrates into the dark, archaic, wild regions of the soul of his patient

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<sup>30</sup> S. Freud, *Briefe an Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904*, ed. J.M. Masson, Frankfurt 1986, p. 437.



(internal foreign territory, *inneres Ausland*, as Freud put it, *SE* 22: 57) in order to conjure up and defeat evil forces, just as missionaries once penetrated into the Dark Continent to do the same thing.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps Freud's self-analysis is the finest example of such an undertaking. As to the dimension of time of the psychoanalytic chronotope: anyone who transgresses into the darkness of the unconscious leaves the here and now of historical time. This archaic world is there and then. It is governed by the primeval time of myth.

Here are some of the qualities Freud attributes to the Id: it is 'the dark, inaccessible part of our personality'; 'a cauldron full of seething excitations' (*voll brodelnder Erregungen*), 'no good and evil, no morality', chaotic, no space and time, no change (*SE* 22: 73 ff.). Helmut Stockhammer compared Freud's interpretation of the Id with Hegel's interpretation of the African continent and its inhabitants, and found many similarities. Both, Stockhammer concludes, are represented as raw, dark, inhuman, illogical, bestial, inaccessible, full of contradictions, negative, chaotic, incapable of development, low, timeless, sultry, cruel, explosive, perverse, fetishist, cannibalistic, unorganized, unscrupulous, godless, ecstatic, repulsive, capricious and unpredictable, fanatic, primitive, full of energy, blind, sensual, childish, closed, wild, and dark as the night.<sup>32</sup>

While Freud attempted to show up 'similarities between the mental life of neurotics and that of savages' (as the subtitle of *Totem and Tabu* reads), Lévi-Strauss has pointed out the similarities between the mental life of savages and that of psychoanalysts. Psychoanalysis, he holds, is not so much a sound strategy of scientifically explaining myth, as rather an authentic form of mythic thought itself, characterized by *bricolage*, the creation of narrative plots, and especially the overcoming of paradoxes and

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<sup>31</sup> The movement of the hero through narrative space is discussed by J. Lotman, 'On the metalanguage of a typological description of culture', *Semiotica* 14 (1975): 97-123. Cf. F.J. Sulloway's remarks on Freud as a hero-type in traditional Freud scholarship and biography: *Freud: Biologist of the Mind*, New York 1983, chapter 13.

<sup>32</sup> H. Stockhammer, 'Schnappschüsse in Schwarzweiss oder: Wo liegt Afrika? Kolonialistische Denkformen in Hegels Geschichtsphilosophie und Freuds Metapsychologie', *Unter dem Pflaster liegt der Strand* 15 (1985): 125-58.

contradictions.<sup>33</sup>

*Psychoanalytic interpretations of alterity*

So what we seem to have here is a full-blown circle. A theoretical approach frequently invoked to explain structures of alterity itself contains such structures. Thus Wallace, a psychoanalyst and historian of psychoanalysis, in his monograph on *Freud and Anthropology*, holds that 'primitive' societies can be differentiated from contemporary Western societies 'in terms of their greater institutionalization of primary-process, in contrast to secondary process, modes', and that 'there is indeed an underlying commonality in neurosis and primitivity'.<sup>34</sup> Thinking and feeling in these societies, this means, are relatively unburdened by the demands of reality, time, order, or logic. In his classic book on *Wild Men in the Middle Ages* (1952), Bernheimer is prone to the same stereotypes. 'It appears that the notion of the wild man,' he writes, 'must respond and be due to a persistent psychological urge. We may define this urge as the need to give external expression [...] to the impulses of reckless physical self-assertion which are hidden in all of us, but normally kept under control. These impulses, which are strongest and most aggressive in the very young, are restricted slowly, as the child learns to come to terms with a civilized environment'. The wild man is exactly what we are, when stripped of 'all those acquired tastes and patterns of behavior which are part of our adjustment to civilization'. His life, and our essential nature, is one of 'bestial self-fulfilment, directed by instinct rather than volition'. The wild man's actions 'reflect to an absolute degree those impulses which make their compromise with the demands of reality. He approaches women with raw lust, or with bleak hatred'.<sup>35</sup>

Not even Mary Midgley, in her pioneering work on the interpre-

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<sup>33</sup> C. Lévi-Strauss, *op. cit.*, chapter 14. For a systematic comparison between the activities of the psychoanalyst and those of the shaman, showing many parallels, see his 'Magie et religion', in *Anthropologie structurale* (Paris 1974), esp. pp. 218-26.

<sup>34</sup> E.R. Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

<sup>35</sup> R. Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages* (1952) reprint New York 1979, pp. 3, 4, 121.

tation of animals in traditional philosophy, escapes from this view of human nature. She sees man as 'a dangerous beast'. Man has always 'been unwilling to admit his own ferocity, and has tried to deflect attention from it by making animals out to be more ferocious than they are'. Her interpretation of early man is equally stereotypical: 'Let us consider the predicament of primitive man. He is not without natural inhibitions, but his inhibitions are weak. [...] He does horrible things, and is filled with remorse afterwards'. Her own, corresponding view of animal nature has strong primitivistic connotations, and, ironically, represents a lapse into the opposite of the negative traditional stereotype of animals she criticizes.<sup>36</sup>

These are just a few examples, but it would not be difficult to find many more. The wildness of the other, according to psychoanalysis, is an imaginary construct, a projection of a real wildness deep in ourselves on others. I put it that this wildness deep in ourselves is itself an imaginary construct, too, that an archaic, animal other within is hypostatized from the bourgeois self precisely to constitute that self by the repudiation and exclusion of 'low' and 'other' anti-values. Psychoanalysis, consequently, seems to be more interesting as a case than as an explanatory theory of alterity. Alterity is a discursive structure, and has slipped into psychoanalysis from hegemonic, disciplining cultural discourse: on culture and nature, man and animal, the civilized and the primitive, male and female, the ascent from wildness to civilization.

Things are not as psychoanalysis holds them to be, but precisely the other way around. Mythic themes do not well up from the depths of the human psyche to find their way into legends, popular customs, folklore, views of others and other kinds of human discursive behaviour; the rabbit which jumps out of this hat was smuggled into it first, when Freud constructed his model of the human soul under the influence of his wide readings in anthropology, mythology and folklore. Discursive structures such as the Oedipus plot found their way into the psychoanalytic narrative construction of a primal landscape within, characterized by heterogeneous space and allochronic time.

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<sup>36</sup> M. Midgley, *op. cit.*, pp. 28, 31, 40.

### Conclusion

Freud with his fascinating high drama of human phylogenesis managed to knit together, and to impose form and order upon, many strange facts. His view of the human psyche to a considerable extent came about by the imaginative use of themes and material from myths, folklore, archeology and anthropology, and his supposedly purely empirical findings are heavily laden with a-priori preconceptions on this level; and these are central, not peripheral to the basic tenets of his theoretical work.

My primary aim in this paper was to show up structures of alterity in the very heart of a theoretical approach often invoked to explain such structures. A burning issue remains, which (stressing, as I did, the fictional and creative aspects of Freud's writings) I have addressed only indirectly: that of the scientific value of psychoanalysis. Freud's ideas on primeval man, apart from their methodological flaws, turn out to be speculative and outdated, and this reflects upon the validity of his theory of human behaviour. Frans de Waal's *Peacemaking among Primates* may be read as a cogent correction upon the traditional negative stereotype of the animal (including the animal within ourselves) as an impulsive, ferocious, brutish monster. The archeological metaphor has been criticized by Donald Spence as deceptive, unsupported by clinical evidence, and hermeneutically naive in suggesting the possibility of reconstructing historical truth from context-free, unequivocal data. And Gérard Mendel, to name but one more of many critics of psychoanalysis, has demonstrated the outdated character of crucial biological foundations of freudian psychoanalysis, especially its lamarckism.<sup>37</sup>

Freud's view of man and the (civilized) human condition is essentially a tragic one: man has fallen from nature, and can only maintain himself by denying his archaic heritage, by controlling the salacious, aggressive animal Other within. Modern man has to cope with his ineradicable animal nature. He is eternally afflicted by phylogenetic guilt, and therefore pays a high price for acquiring civilization. The world within

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<sup>37</sup> F. de Waal, *Peacemaking among Primates*, Boston 1988 (and cf. Midgley, *op.cit.*); D. Spence, *The Freudian Metaphor. Toward a Paradigm Change in Psychoanalysis*, New York 1987 (for a defence of the archaeological metaphor, see D. Kuspit, *op. cit.*); G. Mendel, *La psychanalyse revisitée*, Paris 1989 (along the same lines: Sulloway, *op. cit.*).

as Freud constructed it is intricately related to that of a nineteenth-century civilizational discourse on races, sexes, classes and empire, and the wild other who inhabits this world within turns out to be an avatar of the colonial and sexual others constructed in this discourse.

Sigmund Freud: anthropologist of the mind, archeologist of the soul, master of narrative, builder of myth.